

For a Free and Open Internet

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04/17/2017

The Internet originally burgeoned under the guidance of the end to end principle, which advocates that Internet infrastructure should remain as infrastructure only, governed only at either end of interaction. This principle served the growth of the Internet well in the beginning (Meuller, 2007).

The harsh reality is however that, since the early days of the Internet, technology has advanced such that total nondiscrimination of services is simply not practical or desirable anymore. Some level of mid-level discrimination has become necessary, quite ironically in current context, in order to help users maintain their own privacy and security. (Peha, 2007).

Some level of discrimination is required to identify and label malicious programming and spam. Through this tactic, Internet service providers are able to protect users, improving privacy and security.

Perhaps it is this idea which is used to justify the recent deregulation of Internet service providers by Congress. Having studied business, and its influence on politics, however, I doubt this.

Far from helping to maintain a free and open Internet, the recent repeal of Federal Communications Commission's Internet privacy protections has offered users' transaction data up to service providers to sell, trade, and utilize for profit (Fung, 2017).

The defense of this decision suggests that such deregulation is aimed at stimulating development and innovation. Supporters claim that this allows consumers to voice preferences via the free market, by choosing service providers or plans offering the desired level of privacy and service at a premium (Fung, 2017; Steimle, 2014).

However, this concept of the power of the free market only works in situations of healthy competition. Such is not the case among Internet service providers. In recent years, competition in this market has declined dramatically. The market is now dominated by a very few corporations. In some areas of the US, there is no competition at all. Users must submit to a single service provider's policies for basic access. At a time when jobs,

government services, and commerce are so heavily conducted online, this leaves many Americans without an economic voice, undermining the free market argument entirely (Peha, 2007; Bach, Shaffer, Wolfson, 2013).

Furthermore, such a situation facilitates a widespread state of digital exclusion by allowing Internet service providers far too much power over digital access among the underserved. The result of this is further increase the digital divide, and income gap. In an information age so entrenched in digital access, such issues strike a staggering blow to the human capital of the US workforce amidst quickly increasing globalization (Back, Shaffer, Wolfson, 2013).

References

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